



**University  
of Victoria**

Graduate Studies

**Notice of the Final Oral Examination  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

of

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MSc (University of Victoria, 2011)

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**“A Conceptual Framework of Sense of Place: Examining the Roles of Spatial  
Navigation and Place Imageability”**

Department of Psychology

Friday, October 23, 2015

2:00PM

University Centre

Room A207a

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Robert Gifford, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria (Supervisor)

Dr. Elizabeth Brimacombe, Department of Psychology, UVic (Member)

Dr. Maged Senbel, School of Community and Regional Planning, UBC (Outside Member)

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Dr. Sadik Dost, Department of Mechanical Engineering, UVic

## **Abstract**

A call has been made in social science and neuroscientific literature to better understand the psychological construct of sense of place in relation with spatial cognition, place imageability, and meaning. In response, this dissertation proposes a conceptual framework of sense of place, adapted from Jorgensen and Stedman (2001; 2006) that includes variables of spatial navigational strategy (i.e., egocentric and allocentric) and place imageability using Kevin Lynch's (1960) notions of edges, paths, landmarks, districts, nodes.

Three studies using different methods tested the proposed framework. Study 1 used a questionnaire and an interview-based protocol analysis to examine whether navigational strategy associated with participants' levels of sense of place for recalled urban neighbourhoods. Preliminary work investigating whether sense of place and spatial navigation varied with place imageability was also done using qualitative analyses. Participants used more egocentric and allocentric strategies during cognitive map navigation when sense of place was stronger compared to when they recalled places for which they felt weak or neutral levels of sense of place. Seven categories were revealed from participants' qualitative descriptions of urban place visualizations after completing three sense of place scales (i.e., home-sense, compactness, environment, safety, vibrancy, design, and aesthetics) and differed depending on sense of place condition.

Study 2 enabled participants to articulate recollections of settings for which they felt different strengths of sense of place via a cognitive mapping task. Results reinforced the notion that individuals who experience a strong level of sense of place for an urban environment also recall more of the physical features that make it imageable. Existing literature was confirmed by this study's results that paths and landmarks are integral to urban place imageability.

Study 3 gathered information about community members' current representations of their urban neighbourhood. Results supported hypotheses based on results of Studies 1 and 2. Nodes, edges, and landmarks were found to be particularly meaningful to residents' spatial understanding of their neighbourhood. The fact that more allocentric strategies than egocentric strategies were used in each of the three place imageability conditions (compared to non-significant differences in sense of place conditions in Study 1) highlights compelling future research questions concerning the three variables of the proposed conceptual framework of sense of place. Similar to Study 1, qualitative analyses in Study 3 revealed paths as the predominant meaningful place imageable feature noted by residents. Thematic information about the features in each area reported to have meaning for residents indicate the categories of environment, aesthetics, and design as most prevalent.

As a whole, this dissertation can inform future environmental psychology research, as well as the practices of urban planners, as they consider spatial navigation and place imageable attributes in relation to the psychological construct of sense of place in urban environments. Planners and researchers alike may benefit from this dissertation as they respond to human spatial needs while facilitating a sense of attachment and identity toward, and compatibility with, city spaces. Finally, findings may assist social scientists in clarifying how sense of place develops in urban neighbourhoods, and how it is experienced over time.